

Legislative Issue Brief – Flexibility of 911 Funds



Catawba County Board of Commissioner's Legislative Goal

Support greater flexibility in the use of E-911 funds, by encouraging adoption of the State 911 Board's 911 Study Group's recommendations, in full.

Background

Catawba County, for many years has had the philosophy that E-911 funds should be used for the locating, receiving, processing, and dispatching of emergency calls for law enforcement, medical, rescue, and other public safety services. Current law, and E-911 regulations, only allow for E-911 funds to be used for a portion of the entire emergency call process. Due to recent changes in the E-911 funding law, Catawba County has been forced to shift approximately \$215,532 in recurring 911 Center expenses, formerly paid by E-911 funds, to the property tax. This is not logical since the E-911 fee more closely reflect the population using the service.

In addition to more closely reflecting the users of this service, the greater flexibility in the use of E-911 funds will allow for a better level of 911 services for the public. By currently allowing county governments to only spend E-911 funds on functions relating to the receiving and utilizing voice and data, the State has taken away a tool county governments can use to invest in a more modern E-911 system, which includes equipment and training related to locating, processing, and dispatching of 911 calls. The ability to modernize 911 services will help to ensure the public's safety.

Several local pieces of legislation were introduced during the 2009 Long Session of the General Assembly that would have broadened the use of 911 Funds. Instead of taking action on these separate pieces of legislation, the General Assembly rolled all of the bills into a single piece of legislation calling for a study of the use of 911 Funds. Separately, the State's 911 Board formed a 911 Study group of 12 local government officials that were given the task of studying the 911 System. Assistant County Manager Lee Worsley was appointed to this group and they have been working since June 2009 on recommendations. The 911 Study Group presented recommendations to the 911 Board in December 2009, which included a recommendation to expand the use of 911 Funds. The General Assembly should consider the work of the 911 Study Group in its entirety and introduce legislation that will align the funding model of the 911 system with call receipt and dispatch of 911 calls.

On April 26, 2010, the House Select Committee on the Use of 911 Funds adopted a findings report that recommended legislation to enable local governments, after meeting 911 Center Standards, be given flexibility to use 911 Funds for items of than the receipt of the phone call. This action is consistent with the goals enumerated above and the goal of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. Additionally, the House Committee recommended that the makeup of the State's 911 Board be changed to reflect eight members representing the public sector and eight members reflecting the telephone industry. Currently, the 911 Board has nine members that represent the telephone industry.

On May 12, 2010, House Bill 1691 was introduced which contains that recommendations of the House Select Committee on the Use of 911 Funds. Catawba County actively supports the adoption of this Bill as introduced. The Bill is now scheduled to be heard in the House Committee on Public Utilities on Wednesday, June 2, 2010.

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